



GREATER LONDON REGION RETIRED MEMBERS SPRING 2019



Once again we have our Committee in place for another year. We have various committees that we share around the team to suit people's interests and strengths. Our members represent all our retired members and add another view to that of our working members of UNISON and that gives a very balanced view to all the working parties. We are going through difficult times at present and are mindful of the concerns of many older people and we do our best to support all. The other end of the spectrum is our young people whose education is underfunded and in the year of young people we hope to support them as much as we can.

Ann Jefferson , Chair, Retired Members Committee

20TH SEPTEMBER SEMINAR

Thompsons Solicitors' Mani Gill talked about the personal injury service available to members and their families. After an incident there is a three year limit to claims. Prompt medical attention and legal advice are advised. Also witness details and photos, for example, of a damaged pavement. CCTV footage may be deleted after thirty days. Signs or their absence can be significant evidence.

HOUSING CRISIS

Tony O'Brian, author of "Tackling the Housing Crisis" said that all generations are affected by the housing crisis and need to fight together to make the case for public sector housing. The National

Pensioners Convention campaigns on this issue. The Thatcher Government began the policy of dismantling the public housing stock. The Cameron Government, assisted by the Liberal Democrats, diluted health and safety legislation. The de-regulation of building regulations is expected to be found to have been a contributory factor in the Grenfell Tower disaster. A price cap on house purchases and rents is required with a right to secure tenancy. The Right to Buy scheme, which inflates house prices, must end. The objective for campaigners should be to reinforce Labour Party housing policy, and to elect a Labour government to enact housing changes.

PROPORTION SENSE

Fred Roberts, Committee Member, explained that UNISON policy is aimed at achieving at least a 50/50 gender proportion on committees and delegations. The current Greater London Region Retired Members Committee has 10 men and 14 women which closely reflects the gender balance of retired members in the region.

In response to a question as to female seats not being filled, Richard Mann,

Vice Chairperson, said that members could be co-opted. The national total of women retired members is 129,000. Members should be encouraged to check and amend their membership profiles as 9% are recorded as gender unknown. Greater London Region has over 16,000 members, with 9,695 women and 6412 men.

GRENFELL AFTERMATH

Steve Terry, UNISON Political Officer, spoke of the heartrending accounts of families, and of emergency services staff, who attempted to save lives. The pledges to re-house survivors within a short period, were ill-advised. UNISON had to threaten legal action against the Tenant Management Organisation to ensure staff were transferred back to the Council after 20 years. It is important to differentiate between the Council and the staff trying to deliver the service. Public service is often thankless. Our members were there to assist residents. They are there now to assist victims and relatives.

NO RUSH TO JUDGEMENT

Reason and evidence are needed to make a judgement and abusive comments on social media calling people murderers is not helpful. There should be no rush to judgement. That is why we have an enquiry to reveal the truth about the cladding, and to enable appropriate prosecutions.

MEMBERS' DATA

Libby Bate, UNISON Data Protection Officer explained the new Data Protection Regulations, effective from 29th May 2018 and cited Facebook and Cambridge Analytica as examples of previous bad practice. Members' personal data is legally protected and enforcement of the regulations is subject to scrutiny equivalent to a financial audit. All members with access to this information are responsible for keeping it safe.

CITY HALL VISIT

On 13th September a group of Retired Members Committee Members, led by Chairperson Ann Jefferson, attended Sadiq Khan's Question Time. This is a public event, occurring 10 times per year, when Assembly Members hold the Mayor to account. Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, Green and UKIP parties are represented. We were welcomed by Len Duval, member for Greenwich and Lewisham, and his assistant Susan Jeary.

QUESTIONS FOR THE MAYOR

The Mayor greeted our UNISON group, and then responded to questions, some of them hostile, from the 25 members during a long session. The issues included crippling police cuts, crime, new opportunities for living rents and shared ownership, high child obesity levels, single parents living in poverty, cladding removal financial responsibility, and low recycling rates.

POLICE AND CRIME COMMITTEE

Our group returned to City Hall on 12th December for this event. Chaired by Member Steve O'Connor, this Committee has 12 members. Residents of the City and East constituency may be familiar with Assembly Member Unmesh Desai's regular reports highlighting investigations into violent crime, police cuts, terrorism, knife crime, domestic abuse, slavery moped crime and acid attacks. Cross party co-operation is a noticeable feature of this committee. Police officers contributed to the debate which began with concerns about delays in finding hospital beds for mental health patients often with issues linked to drugs or debt. They may have to wait hours in Accident and Emergency with police officers who are receiving other urgent calls.

TRAINING IMPROVEMENT

Many incidents are not criminal and need an ambulance or social workers rather than a police car. Assaults by patients on staff and on patients, which can be sexual, occur. Transport police are fre-

quently involved in suicide prevention. Acute concerns about the use of restraint remain. Although the use of body cameras has increased, they are not a substitute for well-trained officers. Police mental health can be affected by case pressure, inadequate resources, and visiting relatives of people who die in custody, for example. An improvement in understanding burnout was reported, aided by counselling and mental health toolkits. Improved empathy training in handling patients is provided. Some progress was reported on the presence of NHS nurses in custody suites.

ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Delegate Meeting was on February 20th. A motion calling for a minimum of eight weeks' notice of Retired Member meetings was DEFEATED. A motion for Retired Members' Secretary Communication was CARRIED with amendment stating that: *All email correspondence from Retired Members Committee Secretary to Branch Secretaries relating to retired members will be copied via email to the Retired Members Secretary within the branch if they have one.* A motion requesting the Committee to campaign for the defence of a free TV licence for the over 75s was CARRIED .

CHILDREN AND YOUTH SERVICES

Waltham Forest Councillor Grace Williams described how social workers, police, and teachers work together to respond to the public emergency of domestic and gang violence, with a focus on teaching adult skills and encouraging em-

ployment. At the heart of unions and Labour party policy is a vision of social mobility, with a need to focus on outcomes rather than structures. One Stop Shops at local family centres can offer access to services, support and also adult training skills. Some government help is available, but there is a low take-up nationwide. More parents should be taking advantage of the year health checks available for children.

The Department of Education sanctions the building of Free Schools with no account taken of new housing, the number of places, or the quality of the provider. Sustaining local accountability is problematic as academies are independent organisations. For example in Waltham Forest The Silver Birch Academy Trust has no governing body just an advisory committee. Strong offers are required to persuade maintained schools to stay under local authority control. Learning partnerships involve local authority working with academies and free schools.

KEEPING CHILDREN IN THE MAINSTREAM

The inner London funding gap undermines the recruitment and retention of teachers. Juvenile criminal exploitation has to be challenged with action to keep those children in mainstream education. A mental health charter is being developed for young people with digital counselling and adolescent safeguarding



If you have any questions for our Committee or Secretary please contact Gabby Guarino, Retired Members Secretary, Greater London Region by email at g.guarino@unison.co.uk

shared across different organisations. This partnership programme has assistance from the Mayor. Apprenticeship provision is needed but currently there is no proposal for a replacement for European social funding. Councillor Williams said she was inspired by social and childcare workers.

THERE FOR YOU

This is the UNISON Welfare charity which provides confidential advice and support services for members and their dependants. It relies on the support of volunteers and donations. Financial support is possible. Benefits calculators are accessible. Wellbeing breaks can be supported depending on financial circumstances. There are links to Credit Unions offering low interest loans and savings accounts. **Debtline 0800 389 3302** offers advice and support.

Further information is available from 020 7121 5620, thereforyou@unison.co.uk and Branch Welfare Officers,

Dates for your diary 2019

Committee Meetings:

Weds 20th February

Tuesday 4th June

Weds 4th September

Tuesday 3rd December

18th-21st June National Delegates Conference (Liverpool)

1st-2nd October, Retired Members Conference (Southport)

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